

THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

## Out with the old PC, responsibly

By Globe Staff, 12/14/2000

**P**ORTSMOUTH, N.H. - Millions of new computers will appear under Christmas trees later this month to replace older, slower PCs. The nonprofit Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition and New Hampshire-based Pax World Funds, home of America's first socially responsible mutual fund, have issued a set of tips to help consumers recycle computers.

Even though 90 percent of computer contents can be reused, only about 6 percent of PCs abandoned during 1998 were recycled, according to SVTC. The National Safety Council projects that more than 3.15 million computers will become obsolete by the year 2004 and that simply throwing these machines away would add an estimated 8.5 million tons of waste to America's landfills. Hundreds of materials in PCs, including chlorinated and brominated substances, metals, gases, acids, and plastic additives, are highly toxic.

"It's not difficult to discard these old machines safely," said Anita Green, world director of social research for Pax. "The only challenge is letting the public know about the dangers that old computers pose to the environment and the fact that old computers still have value. Schools, community groups, and senior homes are all in dire need of this still very useful equipment."

Ted Smith, executive director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, said, "This is the Christmas that American consumers must wake up to the need for computer recycling. Last year, the computer industry passed a major milestone, with more than half of US homes owning at least one PC. Even with the expected holiday period slump, US home computer sales for all of 2000 will still rise by more than 21 million additional units this year. We want to make sure that the US doesn't end up with 20 million or more computers clogging landfills."

With that in mind, the two groups recommend the following:

Stop thinking of your old computer as junk. Most people mistakenly assume that just because they have outgrown a computer, it is worthless. The reality is that thousands of schools, community-based organizations, and other groups can get much good use out of your old computer. Even if it is no longer satisfactory for you, your computer may still do a world of good to others. Contact your local schools, community groups, and senior centers.

For a state-by-state listing of organizations that recycle computers, go to [http://www.](http://www.microweb.com/pepsite/Recycle/)

[microweb.com/pepsite/Recycle/](http://www.microweb.com/pepsite/Recycle/)

recycle-index.html.

Keep in mind that your computer is no friend of the environment. Though the PC industry is thought of by most people as green, the reality is that the industry does a lot of polluting. Computers contain hundreds of harmful metals, acids, and plastics. If you care about the environment, you need to think about proper disposal of your computer.

Encourage computer manufacturers to adopt take-back programs. The most effective way to minimize PC pollution is if it is easy for consumers to send their computers back to the factory for state-of-the-art recycling. To send e-mails encouraging buy-back programs, go to Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition Clean Computer Campaign page at <http://www.svtc.org/cleancc/4ht-letters.htm>.

[svtc.org/cleancc/4ht-letters.htm](http://www.svtc.org/cleancc/4ht-letters.htm).

Find a home for your computer with a national nonprofit group. Go to:  
<http://www.usedcomputer.com/nonprof.html>.

For information on passing your computer along to a charity or school that could put it to use. Go to <http://sharetechnology.org>.

Use your zip code to find local recycling options for computers and other materials. Go to <http://www.1800cleanup.org>.

Off the Web, you can look up Recycling Services in your local Yellow Pages. Many communities list computer recycling services.

Dispose with great caution. Unless you know what you are doing, don't crack open your computer on your own. In addition to the hazardous materials they contain, computers carry an electrical charge in their power supply long after being unplugged. Tampering with such devices can cause serious injury from electric shock.

To access the *Pax World Funds/SVTC tips online*, go to [www](http://www.paxfund.com/pcrecycletips.htm).

[paxfund.com/pcrecycletips.htm](http://www.paxfund.com/pcrecycletips.htm).

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# The Cupertino COURIER

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## The Clean Fight

By KEVIN FAYLE

The Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (SVTC) on Nov. 16 held its annual anniversary celebration, marking its 18th year of activity, at the De Anza College Campus Center. A visit by renowned environmental-rights crusader Erin Brockovich highlighted the day's activities that began during the afternoon with a press conference asking Pacific Gas and Electric to disclose all potential sources of PCB contamination in local creeks.

Brockovich's case against PG&E was recently featured in the movie, *Erin Brockovich*, starring Julia Roberts. It focused nationwide attention to the problem of corporate pollution.

Brockovich worked with lawyer Ed Masry on a lawsuit against PG&E after her investigation of health records in Hinkley, Calif. After further investigation, she discovered PG&E's nearby compressor station had been leaking the toxic chemical, chromium 6, into Hinkley's groundwater for decades, resulting in serious illnesses among its residents. In 1996, courts ordered PG&E to pay \$333 million in damages to the citizens of Hinkley, as a result of the largest direct action lawsuit of its kind that Brockovich and Masry spearheaded.

Brockovich currently holds the position of director of environmental research for the law firm of Masry and Vitioe, the same firm she worked for during the PG&E case.

The Toxics Coalition awarded Brockovich its Debbie Cole Memorial Community Service Award at its anniversary event, entitled "Catalysts for Community Empowerment and Corporate Responsibility." During a press conference before the event, Brockovich advocated community grassroots organizations, such as the SVTC, as the best option citizens have to protect against corporate exploitation of the environment. Larger groups, such as her law firm, "cannot reach every toxic case globally," she said.

However, she said she believes communities will help themselves once they know how. Brockovich says she receives about 200 emails a day from people requesting her assistance in dealing with issues of pollution.

Brockovich said she doesn't have any projects currently underway in the valley, but she lends her support to groups, such as SVTC that work to protect communities, workers and the environment from corporate pollution.

She also praised the efforts of a group of Pioneer High



Photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer

*Environmentalist, Erin Brockovich, answers questions by the media regarding local PCB water contaminations. Brockovich was in Cupertino to honor Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition's 18th anniversary.*

School students who came to the day's afternoon event to present the results of their experiment that revealed the presence of PCBs in the creek behind their school. "It would be great if more kids took similar steps," Brockovich said.

The students and SVTC believe PG&E substations and maintenance facilities are probable point sources for PCB water contamination. SVTC and the students used the day's ceremonies to call on PG&E to "come clean" and present its records concerning past and present locations where PCBs were and are used.

The SVTC was founded 18 years ago in direct response to the discovery of groundwater contamination caused by leaking underground storage tanks at Fairchild Semiconductor and IBM. The tanks contained waste sol-

vents. The leaks were believed to have contaminated the underground water table that may have resulted in cluster of birth defects in the San Jose neighborhood of Los Paseos.

SVTC has links to De Anza College through Julie Phillips and Kristin Jensen Sullivan, who both teach in the college's environmental program and serve on SVTC's board of directors. The environmental program sponsored the event held at the campus center to give the students an opportunity to see the result of environmental principles put into action.

Phillips said she admired Brockovich's enthusiastic participation in the affair, adding she lingered well after the program ended to chat with students and professors. In fact, Phillip says, "she was the last one to leave the building."

